



Chapter Twenty: In Pajamas

When Monday came, we woke up together to have breakfast, but it didn't feel the same. I could see his anxiety growing in his body. Jasper dropped me back off at my apartment on his way to the office. The FBI building wasn't far from it.

"So, I'll pick you up when I get off tonight?" He offered as we sat in the parking lot. He had a few minutes to spare. We left early because we were worried about traffic. The morning was so hot, heat lines were already rising from the blistering concrete and black tar road top.

"Yeah," I nodded, glancing over at him with a strained smile. "Do you want me to make dinner? We can Netflix and chill," I offered.

"I'd like that. But maybe instead of Netflix... would you prefer to look at places online tonight?" He said in a small voice, almost as if he was worried about my answer.

Smiling, I leaned over and gave him a gentle kiss. "That sounds like a great idea. We'll search this week, and we'll go this weekend to check out any we like?" He quickly nodded, grinning at my words. I loved how eager Jasper was about it. He was such a different man from when first I met him, but it was a good thing. The strain of his lifestyle was getting to him far before he found me. Something had to change.

He pulled me to him, holding me to his chest for a long while. His mouth was gentle but demanding. Finally, he laid his forehead on mine. "There is such a big part of me that wants to just say screw it and go into the apartment with you."

I giggled softly. "We had sex less than twelve hours ago."

"That's not why. I mean, we'd fuck if I went in there. All-day, in fact. But, no..." He trailed off, closing his eyes. "I don't know if I still want to do this." Jasper paused and drew in a deep breath before glancing at me. "I'm not freaking out, but I'm just not sure anymore. I need to see my part through with King, but—"

"Do we need to not look for a place until you find a different job?" I inquired gently, placing my hand on top of his thigh.

He seemed surprised. "What? No. No, I want to stay in Dallas, no matter what. Or at least Texas. I won't quit, especially not now, when they've been so good about holding my position for me. But everyone has these thoughts, right?"

"Quitting their job? Of course."

"You don't." My boyfriend spoke so softly I could barely hear him.

"Mm," I laughed, shaking my head. "That's different. You shouldn't compare our careers, anyway. It's not even possible."

Turning to face me in his seat, he brushed his fingers along my jaw. "It's because you were always meant to be a writer. You're doing exactly what you should be doing."

"And you're supposed to catch the bad guys and bring peace to those who've lost the ones most precious to them. You want to stop because it's hard. I understand that. Not everyone can do it, but you can. Because you're my hero." I adjusted his tie as I gazed into his eyes.

He ducked his head. His cheeks were slightly pink. "My brain says to prove you right. My body is telling me to haul you over my shoulder like a caveman and fuck all week."

"Isn't that what we've already been doing?" I joked with a smirk. I tilted my head to the side, batting my eyelashes innocently. "There were at least three days filled with nothing but sleeping, eating, and banging."

Jasper pouted out his bottom lip. "It wasn't enough." I giggled softly. He kissed me again, his fingers going into my hair and tugging on it gently. "Ugh..." He laid his forehead against

mine. "Tell me to go to work, Goddess. I have no willpower. I'll do whatever you order me to," he said in a jesting tone. It was cute.

"Go, or I'll punish you," I teased against his lips before curling my tongue across the top one. It made him shudder with pleasure.

"Oh, punishment is not a deterrent, Ma'am." His fingers wrapped around the back of my neck.

"I'll get the paddle," I warned seriously.

He leaned in for another kiss. "Please do."

I decided to be sassy and stepped out of the car without saying anything. I told him what I wanted him to do. He quickly followed. I gave him a funny look. "What are we doing, Jasper? Do we need to go get it now?"

"I'm just walking you to your apartment," he swore. Coming around the BMW, he took my hand. I searched for my keys in my purse with the other. When we got to the door, he didn't let me unlock it. Pressing me against it, his deep blue eyes peered into mine. "Okay, I'm really leaving. I promise."

"Good. I don't think you could have handled your punishment, anyway. Disobeying one of my orders like that. And with that attitude. I would have made you suffer all day long," I answered as seductively as possible.

His cheeks flushed a little. "You're a cruel mistress."

"No, but I will be if you don't stop stalling. Make up your mind. Come in and become a slave to your most basic instincts or go be a champion for the voiceless, saving countless lives in the future. It's up to you," I stated as seriously as possible as I leaned my head back against the door.

Glaring, his intense eyes focused on my mouth. Finally, he shook his head. "I'm your servant." He pressed his lips to mine. "Thank you for having such confidence in me. Have a good day, okay?"

Smoothing one of his blond curls away from his forehead, I smiled at him. "I always sincerely try." He grinned in return. "Now, go. Don't be late on your first day."

When I got into the apartment, I leaned against the door and took a deep breath. Roughly, I scrubbed my hands over my face. There were things I needed to do, but all I wanted was to go to sleep. I was sweating already from the heat.

A drowsy Edward came stumbling out of Tanya's bedroom. He was stretching his arms over his head, his chest bare, and just wearing pajama pants. When he realized I was there, his eyes got wide. "Oh, hey."

"Hi," I replied softly.

"How- How are you?" he asked, taking two steps towards the living room. We hadn't seen each other since the night of Tanya's birthday party. Honestly, I had almost forgotten he existed. He wasn't that important to me anymore.

"Uh, fine. Tired," I admitted, putting my purse on the hook beside the door. I couldn't meet his eyes.

We were both standing in silence for several long, awkward seconds. Sniffing, he looked down at his feet. "Um, can I ask you something?" Surprised, I nodded slowly, not saying anything. "What did I do wrong that night? I keep thinking about it. It was innocent, I swear. It just happened so quickly. I don't understand."

It shocked me that this was what we were going to be doing so fast. It wasn't what I was expecting to do when I showed up at my apartment early on a too hot morning. Glancing away from him again, I bit my lip as I considered the best way to explain it to him. "It was me. I shouldn't have agreed in the first place," I eventually replied because it was the truth.

"Why?" He pushed, holding his hand out in front of him. I shrugged, shaking my head in answer. "Are you so disgusted by me? Do you despise me that much? You can't even look at me."

"No. Not at all. And I don't hate you. But I realized what we were doing was wrong. And that I didn't want to be in that position anymore."

He didn't like my words, crossing his arms over his bare chest. "Why was it so unacceptable? I thought we were going to try to be friends."

Pausing, I gazed up towards the ceiling. My brain grasped at straws. Then I sharply looked at the man facing me. "Do you want to have sex with me?"

Edward laughed in surprise. "Yes," he confirmed, his answer just as blunt as my question.

I raised both of my hands up. "And that's why."

Pinching his nose, he closed his eyes as he sighed. "Yeah, okay, but there are plenty of people I wish to have sex with, but I'm not and never will. I realize you don't want me. I understand I slammed that door in a spectacular fashion when I screwed up and grabbed your ass. It was, without a doubt, one of the single stupidest things I've ever done. I'm a creepy idiot, I get it. I'm sorry. Trust me, I regret it."

"Listen... I don't want you to think for even a second that we ever will. I won't lead you on. Dancing with you would have been. You were just so sad, and I was too drunk to realize it before you touched me. It hit me all at once."

"I only wanted to be your friend," he stated in defeat. "I wanted to show you I'm not a perverted douchebag. I'm not a bad person."

Wrapping both of my arms around my stomach, I couldn't look at him still. Everything felt so awkward and embarrassing. "I don't think you are. And we can be friends, but we won't be that kind. I won't be able to dance with you. It's too intimate, and it makes me uncomfortable."

"Do you want to have sex with me?" He asked suddenly. It was so shocking that I laughed. His face scrunched up in annoyance. "It seems like a fair question. It would explain why it caused you to be so uneasy."

"Not even a little. No." I walked towards my room around him, finished with the conversation. "So, as your friend, I won't make you think I do."

He turned to watch me leave. "You wouldn't have freaked out if you didn't."

"I wanted to fuck the version of you I invented in my head. But he never existed, and I only created him because I was too lonely and depressed to find a real man. But now I have one, and there's no comparison."

Edward rubbed the back of his neck, frowning as he did. "I couldn't get you out of my mind when you were gone. I thought about you every single day."

Opening my bedroom door, I deliberated for a second before moving inside. I barely glanced in his direction. "I honestly didn't think about you at all."

Instead of going through my closet and cleaning my room like I intended to, I laid in bed and ordered groceries to be delivered later in the afternoon and went back to sleep until fifteen minutes before they were supposed to show up. The apartment was empty by then, both Edward and Tanya had left for work.

I dreamed about Albany and grilling out when I napped.

Jasper got off precisely at six. It felt strange to have him knocking on the door. I wanted to be in a home he could walk into. For it to be ours. I had given him keys, but he wasn't comfortable enough with my feisty roommate to just barge in.

He had already removed his blazer, his guns put away in the trunk of his BMW for safekeeping. Pulling me into his arms as soon as I opened the door for him, he pressed me against his chest with his hands on my ass.

"How was your day?" I asked as I embraced him tightly, my fingers in his hair. We were both acting like we hadn't seen each other in months, not hours.

"So boring," he mumbled into my neck, making me giggle. It tickled.

"What did you do?"

"I did paperwork from eight until noon, and then I had lunch with my new boss, Dr. Anastas. I learned her husband just bought her two pygmy goats that she puts in baby clothes she gets from thrift stores. She customizes them on her days off. Then did more paperwork from one until six."

It was so hard not to laugh. "Aw! I don't want any baby goats, but I want to play with them. I hope she has a farm for them to run around," I smirked, nuzzling his cheek gently.

He snorted softly against my throat. "They apparently have a lot of land. I think my boss might be a hipster, but I like her. She might be weirder than me, though."

"Better than Jerry?"

"The goats would have been better than Jerry," he replied dryly.

Pulling back with a laugh, I put my hands on his shoulders. "Well, better a quirky hipster with farm animals in pajamas than an asshole."

Jasper chuckled softly, nodding his head in agreement. "Amen, darlin. How was your day?"

"Ugh." I pulled away from him gently. "I ran into Edward this morning as soon as I got inside. He came at me right away about the club, too. I had to explain some things to him. It put me in a bad mood, so I just napped all afternoon."

His frown was so deep, and his nose wrinkled in automatic disgust. "Do I need to clarify some matters for him?"

“No. It’s fine. He didn’t do anything. He wanted to know what he did wrong, and I had to tell him it was several things. Like he aspires to have sex with me, but I don’t want to fuck him. Or touch him. Even if he was just being friendly, I could... feel it, and it made me uncomfortable.”

“Mm, I’m sure he took that well.”

“He told me he couldn’t get me out of his head,” I breathed, horrified by the knowledge. “But I barely even thought about Tanya when we were away, and she really is my dear friend. I certainly didn’t think about him. Why is he so interested? Honestly, I don’t get it.”

My boyfriend put his hand on my cheek as he smiled slightly. “You are the most beautiful woman that has ever turned him down. You are intelligent, creative, and into the same things he is. It just eats him up that he ignored you for years.”

“I’m so glad he did.”

“Me too,” he admitted as his grin grew. “You wouldn’t be mine then. It was his mistake. One he regrets, especially when he sees how happy we are together.”

“He has Tanya. I doubt that part bothers him.”

He shook his head. “Edward told me it does. Before we left.” I looked up at him, stunned. “He sent a message to patch things up before Tanya’s party so it wouldn’t be awkward if I came. I’m not interested in being friends with him again. I don’t hate him, I just-” he sighed. “He’s right to be jealous, though. You’re incredible. And all mine.”

“Yes, sir, I am,” I grinned. “Are you ready for some dinner?”

“Yes, please.” I took his hand and led him towards the kitchen. “So, to change the subject to a much better one, I was thinking about some things we might want from a townhouse. I’d like just a little yard, so we can have a space to grill out. Three bedrooms, two baths for sure. A garage would be nice, too. Do you care about access to a pool? I wouldn’t hate it.”

We spent the entire evening looking at my laptop at houses until we left to go back to the hotel for the night.

